

TESTIMONY

Delivered by Todd D. Rose, President and CEO
Visiting Nurse & Health Services of Connecticut, Inc.
Chairperson of The Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home

Before the Human Services Committee
March 11, 2014

Raised Bill HB 5445

IN SUPPORT:

AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAID COVERAGE OF TELEMONITORING SERVICES

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Todd Rose, President and CEO of Visiting Nurse & Health Services of Connecticut and Chair of The Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home.

We are a Connecticut licensed/Medicare certified home health and hospice agency with an average daily patient census of over 870, serving more than 4,000 Connecticut residents each year.

We are a major employer in Hartford and Tolland County with over 260 employees dedicated to advancing the State's goals of Aging in Place and Money Follows the Person (MFP). Today, with our investment in technology, we care for patients that could only be cared for in a hospital setting just a few years ago. As importantly, we provide these services at a fraction of the cost of the same services provided in a hospital or skilled nursing facility.

We are north central Connecticut's community-based safety net, ensuring that the chronic conditions of the frail elderly, disabled, and homebound are managed and their care coordinated across the healthcare continuum to avoid unnecessary and costly rehospitalization or institutional care.

We SUPPORT Medicaid reimbursement for Telemonitoring services in the home and were one of Connecticut's first home healthcare agencies to implement telehealth technology. We currently have 182 telemonitoring units in patients' homes today.

In the twelve month period ended September 30, 2013, 758 patients received care enhanced by the effectiveness of our telehealth monitoring program. Utilization of telehealth monitoring improves clinical outcomes, reduces total cost of care and decreases the frequency of acute and emergent care utilization.

Beyond the obvious cost effectiveness of telehealth, an often overlooked benefit of telehealth is its effectiveness as a patient and caregiver engagement tool. Telehealth allows us as healthcare providers to educate and maintain contact with patients and their caregivers on a daily basis and compliment our personal interaction.

Currently, as the result of severe underfunding of Medicaid home healthcare services, the vast majority of our telehealth services are provided to Medicare patients. Only 48 of the 758 of those receiving telemonitoring services were Medicaid patients.

Last fiscal year, we sustained over \$1.1-million in losses (43 cents on every dollar spent) providing care to over 500 Medicaid paid patients. The average cost to purchase a telemonitoring unit is \$2,435 and we expend approximately \$146,000 per year on replacement units alone. Given we have not received a penny in reimbursement for these units from Medicaid, we simply cannot afford to provide unpaid telemonitoring services to Medicaid patients and add to what is already an unsustainable business model.

Expanding the use of technology in Connecticut and the benefit of overall healthcare savings can only come about if the providers who install, monitor, and train the patient to use the equipment are reimbursed adequately.

Our population is rapidly aging and the need for care for the chronically ill, frail, disabled and elderly population will continue to grow. We can only achieve efficiency and connectivity to these individuals through innovative use of Telemonitoring in the home. As the state of Connecticut seeks to increase the number of residents receiving health care at home, the cost-benefit of this shift will only be achieved through the increased use of telemedicine. Providers need the incentive of being reimbursed for acquiring, installing and training on the use of this equipment immediately.

Thank you.

What is the power of telemedicine?

Just ask Maryla Underwood, cardiopulmonary coordinator at Vernon-based Visiting Nurse & Health Services of Connecticut (VNHSC), part of the Eastern Connecticut Health Network. Maryla has supervised the care for more than 8,000 patients over 7 years and all have benefited from telehealth services.

VNHSC's in-home Cardiac Rehabilitation and TeleHealth Monitoring program offers patients with heart conditions the attention, treatment, education and self-management techniques that are keeping them out of the hospital and on the path to healthier, longer lives.

"One of our patients is a 68-year old woman with multiple issues: heart failure, diabetes, morbid obesity and sleep apnea," said Underwood. After her discharge from the hospital on November 26, we began working with her and her husband through in-home visits, telehealth monitoring of the patient's vital signs and healthy lifestyle coaching. In coordination with her physician we helped her set a weight loss goal, which would reduce the severity of all her conditions."

Education and behavior management would play a big role. "We start with the basics: what does heart failure really mean? How does diabetes play a role? So many patients haven't really been told, in an understandable way, the severity of their condition or how many good years could be ahead if they make the right choices now," Underwood continued.

The VNHSC team orchestrated in-home visits by trained cardiac rehab nurses and dietitian coaches, telehealth monitoring of the patient's weight and sugar levels, daily phone conversations and frequent transportation to her doctor's office. Dietitians helped the patient's husband learn to buy healthy foods and cook healthier meals.

As she began to see the effects of these changes, the patient's initial resistance gave way to acceptance and active participation. Over a three-month period, she has lost 53 pounds and has her diabetes under control.

Underwood believes that telehealth plays a critical role in how VNHSC serves its cardiac patients in their homes. "Telehealth allows us to closely monitor the patient's vital signs 24/7/365. This allows us to quickly pinpoint problems and address crises in an effective, cost efficient manner. We maintain detailed diaries of the client's vital statistics through telehealth monitoring, coaching and support calls and in-home follow up. Patients bring their diaries to doctor appointments, which helps their physician make any adjustments to their treatment. "